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ABSTRACT

Paul Petzoldt, an early pioneer in outdoor education, saw the need for trained outdoor leaders. This paper presents material from unpublished papers retrieved after his death that clarify and expand on his philosophy of leadership development. Key ideas such as: judgment, 20-20 vision, and use of wilderness expeditions, are expanded upon and discussed. Much of Petzoldt's self-developed methods align with the experiential learning cycle. Students learned by doing a skill, thinking critically, and applying their judgment to decision making. The reflection and analysis process included the "whys" behind a decision and the 20-20 vision metaphor for hindsight. Application occurred throughout an expedition, as more activities were experienced over time through the use of judgment. In this way, students continuously increased their abilities and were clear about limitations of leading others in the wild outdoors. As Petzoldt aged, his ideas, and how to teach them, seemed to become clearer to him. He experimented with younger students, while continuing to focus on college students and professors, who were so ingrained with formal educational methods that they presented a special challenge. Many of his ideas, quotes, and methods are still utilized in leadership training courses. Above all, he wanted self-aware, safe, resourceful, selfless, and environmentally responsible leaders in the field. They, in his mind, would save lives and make traveling in the backcountry a fun and enjoyable experience. (TD)

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Developing Outdoor Leaders: Paul Petzoldt's Perspective

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DEVELOPING OUTDOOR LEADERS: PAUL PETZOLDT'S PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Paul Petzoldt, an early pioneer in outdoor education, saw the need for trained outdoor leaders. Petzoldt spent his professional life educating outdoor leaders to lead safe, enjoyable outdoor adventures without harm to the environment (Bachert, 1987, Ringholz, 1997). Petzoldt, who died in 1999, left a legacy of organizations, books, students, and controversy that have helped shaped the outdoor leadership profession. After his death, boxes of papers and handwritten journals were given to the authors to use for research purposes.

Some of Petzoldt's unpublished ideas are presented in this paper. Key concepts and methods utilized by Petzoldt to train outdoor leaders were found in field journals, manuscripts, speeches and miscellaneous notes written by him over the last twenty years when he was active with the Wilderness Education Association (WEA). Found in the handwritten pages was Petzoldt's advice to those in the business of training outdoor leaders. The purpose of this paper is to compare these unpublished writings with three, well-known published works that describe Petzoldt's history, philosophy, and methods. The published writings are as follows: (a) *The Wilderness Handbook;* (b) *The New Wilderness Handbook;* and, (c) *The NOLS Experience.* These three publications, secondary written sources available to the general public, documented Petzoldt's philosophy. Comparing these publications with the more recent unpublished notes provides clarification and expansion of Petzoldt's thoughts during the final twenty years of his life, yet central ideas and philosophy remained unchanged.

METHODS

The authors' first task was to organize Petzoldt's unpublished works based on prominent ideas and concepts that characterized his philosophy. The following categories were used to sort his recent work: (a) judgment; (b) teaching methods; (c) leadership; (d) expedition behavior; (e) Wilderness Education Association history and certification; and (f) environmental ethics. These categories were chosen based on themes that consistently surfaced during the transcription of his handwritten notes into computer-generated files. In addition to Petzoldt's own words, the researchers took a postmodernist approach by integrating their own knowledge and experience to further interpret his works. Both authors served in the capacity of Petzoldt's students and later as his co-instructors.

The volume of information generated in this project cannot be adequately addressed here. Therefore, the authors chose to focus on the concept of judgment for this paper. Judgment formed the cornerstone of Petzoldt's philosophy on outdoor leadership (Bachert, 1987). Petzoldt believed that the key to quality outdoor leadership hinged on the leader's ability to exercise judgment. The challenge he embraced throughout his career was to develop a method to instill judgment in his students who aspired to be professional outdoor leaders.

While Petzoldt never alluded directly to the experiential learning cycle, he clearly believed that students learn best by doing, reflecting, and applying experience and knowledge as described by Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model. Those key points of reference were used by Petzoldt to develop the outdoor leader's judgment. Petzoldt used techniques discussed in this paper, such as 20-20 vision (hindsight) decisions, to apply his version of the experiential learning model. Judgment was the thread that tied Petzoldt's approach together during the final twenty years, just as it did when he founded NOLS (Bachert, 1987). Petzoldt explained that a specific process should be used to develop a stu-

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dent's judgment. From direct experience learning from and teaching with him, the authors learned that Petzoldt was adamant about teaching the "whys" as the way of developing a student's judgment. He believed that by challenging the student to address the "whys" of every decision, the student would have valuable information for future decisions. He also explained the barrier to developing judgment when the college-educated student insisted on learning the "right way". Petzoldt's trademark as a practitioner was his ability to stimulate the student's critical thinking skills, as opposed to promoting rote memorization of facts.

Two Views on Judgment

Petzoldt believed that judgment was the foundation of good outdoor leadership. His emphasis on this concept can be traced back to his work with the first Outward Bound School when he left tape recordings for the chief instructor who would succeed him (Bachert, 1987). Additionally, "judgment was a major objective of the first NOLS course in 1965" (Bachert, 1987, p. 69). Petzoldt never relinquished his stance on the importance of judgment in outdoor leadership training, and he incorporated the concept in every organization for which he worked. Petzoldt explained judgment this way in 1974: "Judgment is being able to relate one thing to all the other things you know. Judgment is being able to change plans when conditions suggest that necessity..." (Petzoldt, 1974, p. 25). Later, in 1979, Petzoldt defined judgment this way: "Judgment is the result of experiences that are the result of poor judgment" (Bachert, 1987, p. 70).

Over the years Petzoldt expanded his ideas on the concept of judgment. The notion of quality judgment was introduced to the public in the *New Wilderness Handbook* in 1984. The following expanded thoughts on quality judgment were discovered in his personal notes.

> ...Judgment is the ability to use knowledge and experience to make decisions. If one makes decisions that work – we call that "Good Judgment." If one makes a decision that doesn't work – that does not accomplish a purpose – we call that "Bad Judgment." It is customary to explain outdoor accidents by saying: "they used bad judgment."
>
> The outdoor instructor and leader must make hundreds of decisions each day. Some are "small" decisions whose consequences are not too important. Other decisions could be dangerous and detrimental to the purpose of our education.
>
> Quality Judgment Decisions: The quality of one's decisions depends on one's judgment. So the leader, instructor must make "Quality Judgment Decisions" and teach the student how to make Quality Judgment Decisions.
>
> Since our purpose is to teach how to safely and enjoyably use the outdoors without harm to the environment and with consideration for the landowners, administrators, other users and the national welfare, then Quality Judgment Decisions are necessary to accomplish our purpose. Quality Judgment is our ability to make those decisions that work and accomplish our purpose. This ability does not develop automatically with knowledge and experience. Students must be taught how to make Quality Judgment Decisions from their knowledge and experience.
>
> How it is taught: The instructor must teach the knowledge and give the experience necessary for making a decision then teach how to make the decision then teach how to teach others the same procedure. (Petzoldt, n.d.)

Petzoldt went on to explain in his unpublished works what he believed was the appropriate teaching method to develop quality judgment. He believed that most traditional educators use the memorization method. The instructor explains to the class how to accomplish a task such as building a fire. After the explanation, students recall the lecture information and build a fire or complete an exam for evaluation purposes. Petzoldt continued that a second option often is used called the memorization/demonstration method. In this scenario, the instructor describes how to build a fire and demonstrates the technique. Evaluation is based on how closely the student mirrors the demonstration. Finally, Petzoldt described the quality judgment method. He used fire building to make his point as he did in *The New Wilderness Handbook*, but from the perspective of giving WEA instructors advice on the art of training outdoor leaders.

> ...Tell (explain) and demonstrate how to gather small, dry, burnable material, how to lay the fire, how to light the fire, etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. However, in addition to the above the instructor is explaining and demonstrating the reason for each action, each decision and how to those actions and decisions promote the accomplishment of the desired goals of the educational programs... Whenever possible the instructor should use the Quality Judgment Method, which allows the student to transfer judgment and reasons from situation to related situation – very necessary since no two situations in the field are ever the same. (Petzoldt, n.d.)

Petzoldt went far beyond the typical explanation/demonstration of how to "lay" a fire. He broached the concept of combustible temperature and exactly why natural materials ignite based on size and temperature. The difference of building a fire on a hot day versus a cold day was introduced along with many other important considerations. Petzoldt had a "knack" for breaking down a skill into a logical progression supported by the "whys" of every action and decision. Petzoldt would not simply explain the "whys." In his fire-building example, he modeled the Socratic method by questioning students, forcing them to analyze critically. Based on the researchers' personal experience, Petzoldt was not quick to supply an answer. The student was forced to think what was integral in developing quality judgment. Petzoldt's notion of teaching the "whys" was not new, only refined. Even in 1964, Petzoldt introduced the notion of explaining the "whys" as a way of teaching judgment. He explained it this way, "The simplest way, the way everybody can understand, even without experience, is the method of telling why you are teaching them any certain thing" (Bachert, 1987, p. 68). In his later years with WEA, Petzoldt spent his energy working directly with college students and professors. He was working with students schooled in the traditional education system. This experience reinforced and further refined his philosophy. Petzoldt gave this advice when training the college-educated participant:

> Action decisions then is the purpose [of] all outdoor leadership education in the field. It does the leader little good to be able to parrot what one has heard or read. Even exact explanations and analyzations are of little use. The only thing that counts in the wild outdoors in outdoor leadership is the quality of the decision made and its programmatic effect.... (Petzoldt, n.d.)

In reviewing Petzoldt's unpublished writings, it was evident to the authors that Petzoldt desperately wanted to leave advice for future instructors. This trait was not new. Petzoldt left advice for Outward Bound instructors in the form of audiotapes when he left the Colorado Outward Bound School (COBS). What changed was the context. Petzoldt's mission at the time of the reviewed writings focused on preparing WEA instructors to train college-educated wilderness leaders. His experience with WEA students, who were typically older or who had more

education than Outward Bound or NOLS students, created the context for the words he left in the unpublished writings. The college student or college professor with experience had to be prepared in a specific way at trip start. Petzoldt gave the following advice for setting course tone and framing the experience to reduce conflict or participant dissatisfaction.

> Thus the instructor of outdoor leadership must teach for the purpose of developing practical decision making – not for the purpose of memorization or the storing of knowledge not related to decision making.
>
> The explanation of the difference in teaching will need to be explained and illustrated over and over and again and again before the college upper classman, [*sic*] the college graduate and even the college professor so ingrained in our educational system methods of teaching memorization for passing exams based upon speaking and writing memorized material.
>
> The instructor must be prepared for the frustration of the straight-A student who has learned the classroom method of making grades and suddenly finds that they do not have the ability to translate their new learning into decisions as well as their companions who they "beat" in the college grade system.
>
> The instructor of outdoor leadership will be tested dramatically in getting the students to accept the quality of actual task performance plus the ability to make practical decisions as the basis of evaluation and not the ability to regurgitate memorized material, which is a habit of years of classroom experience.
>
> Even with unusual teaching ability, judgment and understanding of human nature the instructor may find educated individuals who may refuse to make the transitions and rebel in rationalized criticism of the methods.
>
> Perhaps the most effective way of avoiding confrontation of outdoor leadership education based upon judgment decision making is to take the student through the thought process used by the instructor in making each decision explaining how and why each decision is made.
>
> However this in itself brings up another situation that must be carefully explained to avoid confrontation with some [students] schooled in the memorized test educational method. (Petzoldt, n.d.)

Petzoldt's frustration with the traditional education system was evident. The researchers' noted when working with Petzoldt that the students' "black and white" way of seeing the world deeply concerned him. The students' concrete view would significantly hinder the decision-making process. He was particularly hard on a student who would not look at a situation from several viewpoints. If a student only searched for "the right way" to operate as a leader, he or she would probably be badgered by Petzoldt.

Petzoldt articulated the process of training future leaders so that they would critically think based on each unique context encountered in the out of doors. An example found in the unpublished writing was the 20-20 (hindsight) vision metaphor, which forced leaders to think critically. Before participating in an activity, Petzoldt would have the students make judgment decisions concerning a forthcoming event. After

the event, students compared judgments they made before the event with the judgments they would have made had they been given the gift of hindsight, a process he called 20-20 vision. This was the term he liked to use to explain the process of reflection in order to develop judgment. Petzoldt discussed the use of 20-20 vision and the fallacy of "black and white" thinking.

> Some or most students–even college graduates–will be looking for "answers." They will be expecting to be told the "right" way, the "wrong" way. The "best" way the "only" way. In such pigeonholes of "right," "wrong," "best," "only," they have stored much of their past learning. They have learned to be comfortable with putting "answers" in their notebooks – to believe as truths that are permanent and inflexible. It is a shock to learn that in making outdoor leadership decisions that there are action judgment decisions that are practical and have an acceptable action affect. Such decisions when analyzed in retrospect after action has taken place can always be improved by looking back with Monday morning quarterback 20-20 vision. So no decision can ever be right if we think of "right" as the "only" or "best" decision. All these words, "right," "wrong," "best," "only," "truth," "worst," connote a finality upon which further changes, modifications and improvement is unnecessary. Every judgment decision can be improved upon when looking back after the experience.
>
> Therefore our outdoor leadership judgment decisions are the ones that work to an acceptable degree–There are no absolutes if one uses "right" way as the "way" or truth to be final judgments then modification of decision is unnecessary.
>
> Before the student can learn to make programmatic decisions and continually modify those decisions to meet the changing situations of the outdoors, one must break the habit of thinking in absolutes. If we know the best way then there is no longer room for improvement. Thinking in "absolutes" and "truths" and making decisions in the field on absolutes is dangerous and impractical. No two situations are ever the same and no two judgments are ever the same.
>
> The student, even the most experienced and educated, must know from the beginning that your method of teaching or the method and ways you teach techniques is not the "best" way or the "only" way but only our way we have found to be practical, programmatic and generally make effective. We are not interested in non-evident best ways or non-existent "truths." We are interested in teaching how to make decisions that work and interested in making continuous improvement in the judgments necessary for that decision making process. (Petzoldt, n.d.)

A good example of breaking absolute habits and using 20-20 is in food rationing. Specific meals or menus are never planned in WEA. Rather, the right amount of food gets to the field to fulfill caloric, weight and cost specifications. Students either plan well and have enough food or run low. This is a typical Petzoldt dramatic field lesson!

Another concept tied to judgment deals with experience. It was obvious that Petzoldt felt strongly about the assumed benefits of experi-

ence as foundation for good leadership. Petzoldt made clear that the general public equated level of experience with the effectiveness of an outdoor leader (Petzoldt, 1974; 1984). Petzoldt maintained a longstanding belief that experience could also be dangerous. According to Petzoldt, it is a false belief that a person develops judgment from experience (Bachert, 1987). Petzoldt consistently shared the example of the cowboy mountain guide. These horse packers and hunting guides would wear their Stetsons, cowboy boots and Levi's in twenty below temperatures. They never changed their ways. They wore the same inappropriate clothing trip after trip no matter how miserable the experience. Petzoldt made clear that these cowboys were not learning from experience (Bachert, 1987). Petzoldt never wavered in this belief even in his later years. This is an important concept to grasp in understanding Petzoldt's argument that judgment can be taught on a standard outdoor leadership course. He stated it this way:

> ...One of the most harmful of these pre-trip concepts is that outdoor skills are synonymous with outdoor leadership. That one "learns by experience." That one is born with "good judgment" which cannot be taught. These ideas – of long standing will be vigorously defended by the student – the leader is advised not to make a frontal, direct effort to attack these ideas – Let them fade away as the student learns to make programmatic decisions based upon actual experience. (Petzoldt, n.d.)

The Expedition Format and Judgment

The themes of teaching judgment utilizing an expedition format carried through from Petzoldt's days with Outward Bound through his tenure with NOLS. He believed this approach was the essence of outdoor leadership development. The WEA curriculum and training process also reflected this philosophy (Drury & Bonney, 1992, Teeters & Lupton, 1997). Petzoldt shared his perspective on how the expedition format can be used to develop the outdoor leader:

> Within the time limits of the course the student must learn how to plan and execute small group expeditions in the wilderness. The absolute and basic knowledge and judgments must be taught. This means the course must be very selective in order to cover the basics in the time allowed.
>
> This is not a course of learning by memorization. It is a course of learning by judgment and doing. This means that the student must know why each subject or skill is being taught – its uses, its application, its relation of other teaching. In addition the student must apply the learning as soon as possible after explanation and demonstration under actual (not make believe) conditions in the field. The student must continue the application throughout the course at every opportunity.
>
> The above method will insure the students' ability to make judgements and decisions of quality in the future when he is in a position of leadership – or equally important, he will be able to spot serious errors when he is a member of a group and not the leader.
>
> Since it is unproductive to teach the student how to plan an expedition before the experience and judgments of execution has taken place, the teaching of planning and execution will be taught simultaneously in the field as opportunity is presented. Much of the teaching will be opportunity teaching. When a mistake is made, when a good

> judgement is made, when a situation arises that necessitates a decision, the instructor may cover a subject pertinent to the situation and related subjects. Such teaching will not conform to a daily outline or set course structure.
>
> What the instructor teaches on any given day will be partially dictated by the terrain, weather, fatigue and spirit of the group, and opportunity. Considering the above, the course outline consists of what will be taught in relation to techniques, skills, information, and judgments. (Petzoldt, n.d.)

It is important to note the evolution of the expedition format as the standard method for training outdoor leaders. When the first Outward Bound School was founded, a base camp programming format was used. Petzoldt had years of expedition experience and realized this would be an effective programming method (Bachert, 1987). Petzoldt and Tap Tapley implemented the expedition course format when they started NOLS. In Petzoldt's final years, he continued to see the expedition as the most effective teaching/learning format. Petzoldt's standard courses during his NOLS and WEA years ranged typically from 28 to 35 days in length. The researchers' remembered Petzoldt explaining that this length of time was needed to really develop the students' judgment using the extended expedition format. This is particularly noteworthy from a historical standpoint, as modern day wilderness courses decrease in length and new methodologies emerge.

Conclusion

This paper contains information obtained from Paul Petzoldt's collection of unpublished materials retrieved from his home after his death in 1999. These unpublished writings were compared to three published works, *The Wilderness Handbook, The New Wilderness Handbook,* and *The NOLS Experience,* which detail Petzoldt's philosophy and methods. An attempt was made to clarify and expand on Petzoldt's philosophy by sharing his perspective during the latter years of his life. Key ideas such as judgment, 20-20 vision, and use of wilderness expeditions were expanded upon and discussed.

Interestingly, much of Petzoldt's self-developed methods align with the experiential learning cycle. Students learned by doing a skill, thinking critically, and applying judgment decisions later in a course. The reflection and analysis process included the "whys" behind a decision and the 20-20 vision metaphor (hindsight). Application occurred throughout an expedition, as more activities were experienced over time through the use of judgment. In this way students were always increasing their abilities and were clear about limitations of leading others in the wild outdoors beyond the road head. Petzoldt, rough and graphic in his methods, innately understood how to educate others in the outdoors. He would kick pots into a fire if a student had a kitchen too close. The lesson had only to occur once for everyone to learn. A group discovered who was selfish and who was selfless when food was running low. Petzoldt only wanted selfless leaders in the field. As he aged his ideas and how to teach the concepts seemed to become clearer to him. He experimented with younger students, while continuing to focus on college students and professors. While only Petzoldt could teach in the way he did, many of his ideas, quotes, and even methods are still utilized in leadership training courses. Above all, he wanted self-aware, safe, resourceful and environmentally responsible leaders in the field. They, in his mind, would save lives and make traveling in the backcountry a fun and enjoyable experience. Keeping the ideas and records of people who have contributed to the development of a profession is important for the field, and these authors are pleased to share information from such a respected leader as Paul Petzoldt.

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